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**18 CHARGED IN FBI STING OPERATION TARGETING IMMIGRATION
FRAUD, BANK FRAUD, CREDIT CARD FRAUD, AND ID THEFT**

DAVID N. KELLEY, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, and PASQUALE D'AMURO, the Assistant Director in Charge of the New York Office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, announced today that 19 defendants were charged in three separate complaints in Manhattan federal court with participating in a complex, large-scale fraud scheme that involved bank fraud, identity theft, check cashing fraud, and credit card fraud.

One complaint charged MOHAMED MABROUK, a/k/a "Hesham," ADEL IBADAH, SAMEH SHALABY, LATIF ELHOUSSAYNI, AHMED KORBAN, ABDOULAYE TOURE, a/k/a "Abdul Mohamed," MOHAMED CHOUBAI, TAREK MOHAMED, MAHMOUD ABDOU, a/k/a "Oka," MOHAMMAD ASSI, a/k/a "Mo," a/k/a "Jersey," MOHAMED MONSOUR, a/k/a "Mike," MOHAMED AYESH, SERY BARAKAT, MARK NEKTALOV, DAVID NERISYAN, and MOHAMED SELIM, with conspiracy to commit bank fraud and access device fraud. Two separate complaints charged SAYED HADDAD, a/k/a/ Elsayed Elhaddad, a/k/a "Said," and SAMIH GHANNAM, a/k/a, "Abu Ali,"

a/k/a, "Annter Shadhan," with conspiracy to commit bank fraud and identification document fraud.

The charges are the result of a long-term, FBI sting operation in which a cooperating witness for the Government posed as someone who ran an immigration business that assisted clients with obtaining green cards and other means of identification necessary for obtaining lawful immigration status in the United States. The cooperating witness also posed as a middleman for organized crime members who wanted to purchase stolen and counterfeit checks, credit cards and money orders, and to engage in various other types of financial frauds. Finally, an FBI agent, acting undercover, posed as the Italian organized crime figure for whom the cooperating witness acted as a broker. As part of the sting operation, the FBI was able to outfit an office, which served as the cooperating witness's place of business, with hidden audio and video recording equipment.

It is alleged the charged individuals were largely part of a single fraud ring led by one of the charged defendants, MOHAMED MABROUK, a/k/a "Hesham." Often under MABROUK's direction, the members of this fraud ring allegedly sold the cooperating witness and the undercover FBI agent hundreds of thousands of dollars in counterfeit and stolen checks and other Government securities, stolen money orders which had been transported in interstate commerce, and fraudulently obtained

credit cards and Home Depot Gift Cards. In addition, certain members of the fraud ring allegedly set up a phony business called Bergen Trading Corporation, in order to obtain a fraudulent \$100,000 line of credit. Finally, certain of the charged defendants, including SAYED HADDAD, a/k/a "Elsayed Elhaddad," a/k/a "Said," and SAMIH GHANNAM, a/k/a "Abu Ali," a/k/a "Annter Shadhan," allegedly claimed to have connections inside various Department of Motor Vehicles state offices through which they could fraudulently obtain drivers licenses under any name, for a fee.

Of the 18 defendants, 14 were arrested by FBI agents in the New York area and presented before United States Magistrate Judge RONALD L. ELLIS in Manhattan federal court yesterday. Four defendants remain at large.

If convicted, each defendant faces a maximum sentence of up to thirty years in jail and a fine of \$1,000,000 or twice the gross gain or loss resulting from the crime.

Mr. KELLEY praised the efforts of the FBI for its assistance in the investigation. Mr. KELLEY said that the investigation is continuing.

Assistant United States Attorneys ROBIN LINSENMYER and MIRIAM E. ROCAH are in charge of the prosecution.

The charges contained in the Complaints are merely accusations, and the defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

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